Below are 2 atoms of lithium. The atom below (left) has an equal number of electrons and protons so it has a neutral charge (no charge).

3 negative electrons are canceled by 3 positive protons.

**5.**

The lithium atom below (right) has only two electrons. 2 negative electrons are canceled by 2 positive protons with one proton left over. This remaining positive proton makes the atom a positively charged ion.

**4.**

**3.**

**2.**

When an atom gains or loses electrons it becomes an **ion.** An ion is an atom that has a positive or negative charge.

When atoms have the same number of protons and electrons, their overall charge is neutral. This is because the positive and negative charges cancel each other out.

This helium atom has an equal number of protons and electrons and therefore has NO CHARGE (neutral).

**1.**

This is the basic structure of a helium atom. All atoms contain a combination of three things:

**Protons (positive charge)**

**Neutrons (neutral charge)**

**Electrons (negative charge)**